



## SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

[Release No. 34-95379; File No. SR-FINRA-2022-019]

### **Self-Regulatory Organizations; Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, Inc.; Notice of Filing of a Proposed Rule Change to Adopt Supplementary Material .19 (Residential Supervisory Location) under FINRA Rule 3110 (Supervision)**

July 27, 2022.

Pursuant to Section 19(b)(1) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (“Act”)<sup>1</sup> and Rule 19b-4 thereunder,<sup>2</sup> notice is hereby given that on July 15, 2022, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, Inc. (“FINRA”) filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (“SEC” or “Commission”) the proposed rule change as described in Items I, II, and III below, which Items have been prepared by FINRA. The Commission is publishing this notice to solicit comments on the proposed rule change from interested persons.

#### **I. Self-Regulatory Organization’s Statement of the Terms of Substance of the Proposed Rule Change**

FINRA is proposing to adopt new Supplementary Material .19 (Residential Supervisory Location) under FINRA Rule 3110 (Supervision) that would align FINRA’s definition of an office of supervisory jurisdiction (“OSJ”) and the classification of a location that supervises activities at non-branch locations with the existing residential exclusions set forth in the branch office definition to treat a private residence at which an associated person engages in specified supervisory activities as a non-branch location, subject to safeguards and limitations. In accordance with Rule 3110(c), as a non-branch location, a Residential Supervisory Location would become subject to inspections on a regular periodic schedule, which is presumed to be at

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<sup>1</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(1).

<sup>2</sup> 17 CFR 240.19b-4.

least every three years,<sup>3</sup> rather than an annual inspection requirement required of OSJs and other supervisory branch offices.<sup>4</sup>

Below is the text of the proposed rule change. Proposed new language is italicized; proposed deletions are bracketed.

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### 3100. SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES

#### 3110. Supervision

(a) through (f) No Change.

••• Supplementary Material: -----

.01 through .17 No Change.

.18 Reserved.

.19 Residential Supervisory Location

(a) Residential Supervisory Location. Notwithstanding any other provisions of Rule 3110(f), and subject to paragraph (b) of this Supplementary Material, a location that is the associated person's private residence where supervisory activities are conducted, including those

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<sup>3</sup> See FINRA Rules 3110(c)(1)(C) and 3110.13.

<sup>4</sup> SEC staff and FINRA have interpreted FINRA rules to require member firms to conduct on-site inspections of branch offices and unregistered offices (i.e., non-branch locations) in accordance with the periodic schedule described under Rule 3110(c)(1). See SEC National Examination Risk Alert, Volume I, Issue 2 (November 30, 2011), <https://www.sec.gov/about/offices/ocie/riskalert-bdbranchinspections.pdf>, and Regulatory Notice 11-54 (November 2011) (joint SEC and FINRA guidance stating, a “broker-dealer must conduct on-site inspections of each of its office locations; [OSJs] and non-OSJ branches that supervise non-branch locations at least annually, all non-supervising branch offices at least every three years; and non-branch offices periodically.”) (footnote defining an OSJ omitted). See also SEC Division of Market Regulation, Staff Legal Bulletin No. 17: Remote Office Supervision (March 19, 2004) (“SLB 17”) (stating, in part, that broker-dealers that conduct business through geographically dispersed offices have not adequately discharged their supervisory obligations where there are no on-site routine or “for cause” inspections of those offices), <https://www.sec.gov/interp/legal/mrslb17.htm>.

described in Rule 3110(f)(1)(D) through (G) or in Rule 3110(f)(2)(B), shall be considered for those activities a non-branch location, provided that:

(1) only one associated person, or multiple associated persons who reside at that location and are members of the same immediate family, conduct business at the location;

(2) the location is not held out to the public as an office;

(3) the associated person does not meet with customers or prospective customers at the location;

(4) any sales activity that takes place at the location complies with the conditions set forth under Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii) or (iii);

(5) neither customer funds nor securities are handled at that location;

(6) the associated person is assigned to a designated branch office, and such designated branch office is reflected on all business cards, stationery, retail communications and other communications to the public by such associated person;

(7) the associated person's correspondence and communications with the public are subject to the firm's supervision in accordance with this Rule;

(8) all electronic communications by the associated person at that location are made through the member's electronic system;

(9) a list of the residence locations is maintained by the member; and

(10) all books or records required to be made and preserved by the member under the federal securities laws or FINRA rules are maintained by the member other than at the location.

(b) Ineligible Locations

A location shall not be eligible for designation as a non-branch location in accordance with Rule 3110.19 if:

(1) the member is designated as a Restricted Firm under Rule 4111;

(2) the member is designated as a Taping Firm under Rule 3170;

(3) the member is currently undergoing, or is required to undergo, a review under Rule 1017(a)(7) as a result of one or more associated persons at such location;

(4) one or more associated persons at such location is a designated supervisor who has less than one year of direct supervisory experience with the member;

(5) one or more associated persons at such location is functioning as a principal for a limited period in accordance with Rule 1210.04;

(6) one or more associated persons at such location is subject to a mandatory heightened supervisory plan under the rules of the SEC, FINRA or state regulatory agency;

(7) one or more associated persons at such location is statutorily disqualified, unless such disqualified person has been approved (or is otherwise permitted pursuant to FINRA rules and the federal securities laws) to associate with a member and is not subject to a mandatory heightened supervisory plan under paragraph (b)(6) of this Supplementary Material or otherwise as a condition to approval or permission for such association;

(8) one or more associated persons at such location has an event in the prior three years that required a “yes” response to any item in Questions 14A(1)(a) and 2(a), 14B(1)(a) and 2(a), 14C, 14D and 14E on Form U4; or

(9) one or more associated persons at such location is currently subject to, or has been notified in writing that it will be subject to, any investigation, proceeding, complaint or other action by the member, the SEC, a self-regulatory organization, including FINRA, or state securities commission (or agency or office performing like functions) alleging they have failed reasonably to supervise another person subject to their supervision, with a view to preventing the violation of any provision of the Securities Act, the Exchange Act, the Investment Advisers Act, the Investment Company Act, the Commodity

Exchange Act, or any rule or regulation under any of such Acts, or any of the rules of the MSRB.

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II. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement of the Purpose of, and Statutory Basis for, the Proposed Rule Change

In its filing with the Commission, FINRA included statements concerning the purpose of and basis for the proposed rule change and discussed any comments it received on the proposed rule change. The text of these statements may be examined at the places specified in Item IV below. FINRA has prepared summaries, set forth in sections A, B, and C below, of the most significant aspects of such statements.

A. Self-Regulatory Organization’s Statement of the Purpose of, and Statutory Basis for, the Proposed Rule Change

1. Purpose

Background

Early in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted FINRA and other regulators to provide temporary relief to member firms from certain regulatory requirements to address the public health crisis.<sup>5</sup> In response to the pandemic, many private and government employers closed their offices and allowed their employees to work from alternative worksites (e.g., an employee’s residence). As jurisdictions scale back pandemic-related restrictions,<sup>6</sup> many member firms are

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<sup>5</sup> Among the temporary regulatory relief provided, FINRA adopted relief pertaining to branch office registration requirements through Form BR (Uniform Branch Office Registration Form) and FINRA Rule 3110(c) inspection requirements. Specifically, FINRA temporarily suspended the requirement for member firms to submit branch office applications on Form BR for any newly opened temporary office locations or space-sharing arrangements established as a result of the pandemic. See Regulatory Notice 20-08 (March 2020) (“Notice 20-08”). With respect to inspection obligations, FINRA adopted temporary Rule 3110.16 that provided additional time for member firms to complete their calendar year 2020 inspection obligations. See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 89188 (June 30, 2020), 85 FR 40713 (July 7, 2020) (Notice of Filing and Immediate Effectiveness of File No. SR-FINRA-2020-019). In response to the ongoing public health crisis, FINRA subsequently adopted temporary FINRA Rule 3110.17, providing member firms the option to conduct inspections of their branch offices and non-branch locations remotely, subject to specified terms therein. See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 90454 (November 18, 2020), 85 FR 75097 (November 24, 2020) (Notice of Filing and Immediate Effectiveness of File No. SR-FINRA-2020-040). FINRA Rule 3110.17 expires on December 31, 2022. See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 94018 (January 20, 2022), 87 FR 4072 (January 26, 2022) (Notice of Filing and Immediate Effectiveness of File No. SR-FINRA-2022-001).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Government of the District of Columbia, Mayor’s Order 2022-029 (February 14, 2022) (announcing the end of the indoor mask mandate at certain venues effective March 1, 2022; and the end of the requirement for certain private venues to check vaccination status effective February 14, 2022); State of New York, “Winter Toolkit for New Phase of COVID Response: Keep New York Safe, Open and Moving Forward” (Governor Kathy Hochul lifting the statewide indoor business mask-or-vaccine requirement starting on February 10, 2022, and remaining optional for businesses, local governments and counties to enforce) (February 9, 2022), <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-announces-winter-toolkit-new-phase-covid-response-keep-new-york-safe-open-and>; and State of California, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, “Governors Newsom, Brown and Inslee Announce Updated Health Guidance,” (announcing that on March 11, 2022, California, Oregon and

moving towards a blended workforce model, whereby employees work both on-site in a conventional office setting and remotely in an alternative location such as a private residence. Based on feedback from member firms, FINRA believes this model will endure, irrespective of the state of the pandemic. The pandemic accelerated reliance on technological advances in surveillance and monitoring capabilities and prompted significant changes in lifestyles and work habits, including the growing expectation for workplace flexibility. These dynamics have persuaded FINRA to review aspects of Rule 3110 that may benefit from modernization.<sup>7</sup> The changes brought forth by the pandemic merit a reevaluation of the regulatory benefit of requiring firms to designate a private residence where lower risk activities are conducted as an OSJ or branch office. In recognition of the significant technology and industry changes that are impacting workplace arrangements, FINRA is proposing to adopt new Supplementary Material .19 under Rule 3110 to establish a Residential Supervisory Location that would be treated as a non-branch location (i.e., an unregistered office), subject to specified investor protection safeguards and limitations. The most significant regulatory effect of the proposed rule change would be that, as a non-branch location, a Residential Supervisory Location would become subject to inspections on a regular periodic schedule, which is presumed to be at least every three

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Washington to adopt new indoor mask policies and move from mask requirements to mask recommendations in schools) (February 28, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> In general, FINRA has had a longstanding practice of periodically reviewing its rules to ensure that they continue to promote their intended investor protection objectives in a manner that is effective and efficient, without imposing undue burdens, particularly in light of technological, industry and market changes. See generally Special Notices to Members 01-35 (May 2001) (“Notice 01-35”) (requesting comment on steps that can be taken to streamline FINRA rules) and 02-10 (January 2002) (“Notice 02-10”) (requesting information on steps that can be taken to streamline FINRA rules). See also Regulatory Notice 14-14 (April 2014) (requesting comment on the effectiveness and efficiency of FINRA’s communications with the public rules) and Regulatory Notice 14-15 (April 2014) (requesting comment on the effectiveness and efficiency of FINRA’s gifts, gratuities and non-cash compensation rules), both launching FINRA’s Retrospective Rule Review Program.

years, rather than an annual inspection requirement required of OSJs and other supervisory branch offices.<sup>8</sup>

#### Evolution of OSJ and Branch Office Definitions

FINRA has periodically assessed the manner in which firms may effectively and efficiently carry out their supervisory responsibilities considering evolving business models and practices, advances in technology, and regulatory benefits. As detailed below, since the late 1980s, the OSJ and branch office definitions have undergone several revisions to address regulatory need and efficiency (e.g., rule alignment with other regulators, access to more robust information), evolving with technological and industry changes while also remaining focused on promoting investor protection.

Under FINRA's (then NASD's) Rules of Fair Practice,<sup>9</sup> an OSJ was defined as "any office designated as directly responsible for the review of the activities of registered representatives or associated persons in such office and/or any other offices of the member[.]" and a branch office was one that was "owned or controlled by a member, and which is engaged in the investment banking or securities business."<sup>10</sup> Further, a place of business of a member firm's associated person was considered a branch office if the member: "(1) directly or indirectly contributes a substantial portion of the operating expenses of any place used by a person associated with a member who is engaged in the investment banking or securities business, whether it be commercial office space or a residence. Operating expenses, for purposes of this standard, shall include items normally associated with the cost of operating the business such as

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<sup>8</sup> See note 3, supra.

<sup>9</sup> FINRA (then NASD) adopted Rules of Fair Practice when it was founded in 1939 under provisions of the 1938 Maloney Act amendments to the Exchange Act.

<sup>10</sup> See Notice to Members 87-41 (June 1987) ("Notice 87-41") (setting forth the proposed rule text changes to Article III, Section 27 of the NASD Rules of Fair Practice for the OSJ definition and Article I, Section (c) of the NASD By-Laws for the branch office definition, among other provisions).

rent and taxes.”<sup>11</sup> In addition, such location was a branch office if the member “authorizes a listing in any publication or any other media, including a professional dealer’s digest or a telephone directory, which listing designates a place as an office or if the member designates a place as an office or if the member designates any such place with an organization as an office.”<sup>12</sup> The term “branch office” was established “merely to designate and identify for registration purposes the various offices of a member other than the main office and as such [were] required to be registered and as to which a registration fee should be paid.”<sup>13</sup>

Over the years, these terms have undergone several modifications, driven by changes in regulatory need and business models. In particular, the subsequent amendments focused on providing regulators robust information when conducting examinations that readily identified the appropriate individuals and records at a firm. In response to such changes, the OSJ and branch office definitions were refined and exemptions from branch office registration were added.

In 1988, as part of several supervisory enhancements, the OSJ and branch office definitions were significantly amended in response to general concerns about member firms’ associated persons engaging in the offer and sale of securities to the public without adequate ongoing supervision and regular examination by member firms.<sup>14</sup> The amendments substantially expanded the specificity of FINRA Rule 3110 (formerly, Article III, Section 27 of the NASD Rules of Fair Practice) with respect to a member’s supervisory obligations and the new standards focused on “the creation of a supervisory ‘chain of command,’ in which qualified supervisory

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<sup>11</sup> See Notice 87-41.

<sup>12</sup> See Notice 87-41.

<sup>13</sup> See Notice 87-41.

<sup>14</sup> See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 26177 (October 13, 1988), 53 FR 41008 (October 19, 1988) (Order Approving File No. SR-NASD-88-31). See also Notice to Members 88-84 (November 1988) (“Notice 88-84”) (announcing SEC approval of File No. SR-NASD-88-31).

personnel are appointed to carry out the firm's supervisory obligations[.]”<sup>15</sup> The newly amended OSJ definition focused on an office at which “the approval [of specified functions] that constitutes formal action by the member takes place.”<sup>16</sup> The amendments also added more prescriptive requirements with respect to OSJs such as requiring a firm to designate as an OSJ an office that meets the OSJ definition and any other location for which such designation would be appropriate; designate one or more registered principals in each OSJ; maintain written supervisory procedures describing the supervisory system implemented and listing the titles, registration status, and locations of the required supervisory personnel and the specific responsibilities associated with each; and keep and maintain the firm's supervisory procedures, or the relevant parts thereof, at each OSJ and at each other location where supervisory activities are conducted on behalf of the firm.<sup>17</sup>

With respect to the branch office definition, the amendments also refined it from any location “owned or controlled by a member, and which [was] engaged in the investment banking or securities business”<sup>18</sup> to “any business location held out to the public or customers by any means as a location at which the investment banking or securities business is conducted on behalf of the member, excluding any location identified solely in a telephone directory line

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<sup>15</sup> See Notice to Members 88-11 (February 1988) (“Notice 88-11”) (requesting comments on proposed amendments to Article III, Section 27 of the NASD Rules of Fair Practice regarding supervision and the OSJ and branch office definitions).

<sup>16</sup> See Notice 88-11. Largely similar to current Rule 3110(f)(1)(A) through (G), the specified functions were: “(1) Order execution and/or market making; (2) Structuring of public offerings or private placements; (3) Maintaining custody of customers' funds and/or securities; (4) Final acceptance (approval) of new accounts on behalf of the member, (5) Review and endorsement of customer orders pursuant to the provisions of proposed Article III, Section 27(d); (6) Final approval of advertising or sales literature for use by persons associated with the member, pursuant to Article III, Section 35(b)(1) of the Rules of Fair Practice; or (7) Responsibility for supervising the activities of persons associated with the member at one or more other offices of the member.” See Notice 88-84.

<sup>17</sup> See Notice 88-84. See generally Rule 3110(a) and (b).

<sup>18</sup> See Notice 87-41.

listing or on a business card or letterhead, which listing, card, or letterhead also sets forth the address and telephone number of the office of the member responsible for supervising the activities of the identified location.”<sup>19</sup>

These definitional amendments were intended to address concerns about the absence of on-site supervision by registered principals at a firm’s business location.<sup>20</sup> The amendments required a “minimum supervisory structure that facilitate[d] closer supervision by principals with clear responsibilities.”<sup>21</sup> In addition, the revisions required OSJ designation for “any office at which the approval that constitutes formal action by the member takes place.”<sup>22</sup> Further, FINRA noted that the enhancements to the supervisory practices and definitions reflected its “continuing commitment to facilitate more effective supervision by members while accommodating their diverse modes of operation.”<sup>23</sup> FINRA believes the definitional amendments brought focus to where final approval of certain functions was occurring so both the firm and regulators would be able to readily identify the principal who was designated to review a specific function and also where original books and records related to such supervision would be kept. At that time, books and records (e.g., account documents, communications, order tickets, trade blotters) were generally made and preserved in hard copy paper format, not electronically, and stored in files at such offices.

In 1992, FINRA further amended the branch office definition to allow additional locations that were not being held out to the public to be exempt from branch office

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<sup>19</sup>     See Notice 88-84.

<sup>20</sup>     See Notice 87-41.

<sup>21</sup>     See Notice 87-41.

<sup>22</sup>     See Notice 88-11.

<sup>23</sup>     See Notice 88-11.

registration.<sup>24</sup> FINRA noted that the exclusions were intended as a reasonable accommodation to member firms with widely dispersed sales personnel selling limited product lines such as variable contracts and mutual funds.<sup>25</sup> In the approval order, the Commission recognized that the amended definition would eliminate the requirement to register as a branch office unless the securities activity at the office required “continuous and direct supervision of a principal, or the location is being held out to the public as a place where a full range of securities activity is being conducted. Having considered the proposal, the Commission believe[d] the rule change will assist [FINRA] members in meeting their obligation to supervise off-site registered representatives under applicable securities laws, regulations and [FINRA] rules.”<sup>26</sup>

In 2001, FINRA launched an initiative to modernize its rules.<sup>27</sup> Based on input from member firms, FINRA identified the branch office definition as a rule that could benefit from modernization in light of the SEC’s amendment to the term “office” in the SEC’s Books and Records Rules,<sup>28</sup> the branch office definition used by the New York Stock Exchange (“NYSE”) and state regulators, new business practices that were developing based on technological innovations, and the potential to create a uniform branch office registration system.<sup>29</sup> FINRA

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<sup>24</sup> In general, these amendments codified interpretations pertaining to the branch office definitions and their exclusions by clarifying that the address and telephone number of the appropriate OSJ or branch office must be provided in advertisements and sales literature, not the address of a non-branch location. See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 30509 (March 24, 1992), 57 FR 10936 (March 31, 1992) (Order Approving File No. SR-NASD-91-42).

<sup>25</sup> See Notice to Members 92-18 (April 1992) (announcing SEC approval of File No. SR-NASD-91-42).

<sup>26</sup> See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 30509 (March 24, 1992), 57 FR 10936, 10937 (March 31, 1992) (Order Approving File No. SR-NASD-91-42).

<sup>27</sup> See Notice 01-35.

<sup>28</sup> 17 CFR 240.17a-3 and 240.17a-4. See generally Notice to Members 01-80 (December 2001) (describing amendments to the SEC Books and Records Rules).

<sup>29</sup> See Notice 02-10.

expressly noted that a factor to be considered in modernizing rules included instances “where the regulatory burden of a rule significantly outweigh[ed] the benefit, or the rule no longer work[ed] efficiently given new technologies.”<sup>30</sup>

Until 2005, member firms were required to complete Schedule E to the Form BD (“Schedule E”) to register or report branch offices to the SEC, FINRA, and the state in which they conducted a securities business that required branch office registration. While Schedule E captured certain data with respect to branch offices, it did not adequately fulfill the evolving needs of regulators. For example, Schedule E did not link an individual registered representative with a particular branch office, which made it more difficult for regulators to track the appropriate individuals for examinations.

As technology advanced and business models changed, FINRA continued its commitment to modernizing the rule while preserving investor protections. By 2005, this initiative led to the establishment of a national standard, a uniform definition of a branch office, that was the product of a coordinated effort among regulators to reduce inconsistencies in the definitions used by the SEC, FINRA, the NYSE, the North American Securities Administrators Association, and state securities regulators to identify locations where broker-dealers conduct securities or investment banking business.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the adoption of a uniform definition facilitated the development of a centralized branch office registration system through the Central Registration Depository and the creation of a uniform form to register or report branch offices electronically with multiple regulators.<sup>32</sup> With the launch of this new technology, firms and regulators could efficiently identify each branch location, which would be assigned a unique branch office number by the system, the individuals assigned to such location, and the designated

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<sup>30</sup> See Notice 01-35.

<sup>31</sup> See Securities Exchange Act Release No. 52403 (September 9, 2005), 70 FR 54782 (September 16, 2005) (Order Approving File No. SR-NASD-2003-104).

<sup>32</sup> See Form BR.

supervisor(s) for such location. This new centralized branch office registration system allowed firms and regulators to efficiently locate offices and individuals, and moreover closed gaps in information, created significant efficiencies and lessened the burden on firms and regulators.

By the 1990s, technology had progressed with the advent of faster internet, wifi, the emergence of web-based platforms, and more portable computers to enhance workplace connectivity that allowed for expanded remote work options. In recognition of the evolving and growing trend in the financial industry and workforce generally to work from home, the uniform branch office definition adopted numerous exclusions, including the current primary residence exclusion. The limitations on use of a primary residence closely tracks the limitations on the use of a private residence in the SEC's Books and Records Rules,<sup>33</sup> which provide that a broker-dealer is not required to maintain records at an office that is a private residence if only one associated person (or multiple associated persons if members of the same family) regularly conducts business at the office, the office is not held out to the public as an office, and neither customer funds nor securities are handled at the office. At the same time, FINRA adopted IM-3010-1 (Standards for Reasonable Review) (now Rule 3110.12 (Standards for Reasonable Review)), as a further safeguard. It clarified the high standards firms must observe regarding supervisory obligations and emphasized the requirement that members already had to establish reasonable supervisory procedures and conduct reviews of locations taking into consideration, among other things: the firm's size, organizational structure, scope of business activities, number and location of offices, the nature and complexity of products and services offered, the volume of business done, the number of associated persons assigned to a location, whether a location has a principal on-site, whether the office is a non-branch location, and the disciplinary history of the registered person.

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<sup>33</sup> See note 28, supra.

During the almost two decades since the adoption of the uniform branch office definition and its related exclusions, regulators have utilized advancements in technology to support their examinations and otherwise further investor protections, and firms have embraced and adopted numerous technologies to enhance their regulatory and compliance programs. The rapid explosion of new technologies in the last 20 years, and the widespread use such of technology (e.g., computers, email, mobile phones, electronic communication systems with audio and visual capabilities, cloud storage of books and records), and the ability to use risk-based surveillance and compliance tools and systems, have fundamentally altered the landscape of how the broker-dealer business is conducted.

These earlier amendments evidence the need to keep the regulatory framework current. FINRA believes that with evolving changes in business models and the significant advance of technological tools that are now readily available, some functions can be exempt from registration, subject to specified conditions, without compromising a reasonably designed supervisory system. Moreover, FINRA believes the proposed rule change to classify some private residences as non-branch locations, subject to specified controls, will not result in a loss of the important regulatory information that the rules were designed, in part, to provide regarding the locations or associated persons. That information will continue to be collected through our regulatory requirements and systems such as the branch office registration system and Form BR (Uniform Branch Office Registration Form) and other uniform registration forms.<sup>34</sup>

#### FINRA Rule 3110 and Current Requirements to Register and Inspect Offices

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<sup>34</sup> For example, under Form U4 (Uniform Application for Securities Industry Registration or Transfer), if an individual's "Office of Employment Address" is an unregistered location, the firm must report the address of such location as the individual's "located at" address and must report the branch office that supervises that non-registered location as the "supervised from" location. See Form U4, Section 1 (General Information). Similar to Form BR, Form U4 solicits information about an individual's other business activities. See Form U4, Section 13 (Other Business) and Form BR, Section 3 (Other Business Activities/Names/Websites). Form BD (Uniform Application for Broker-Dealer Registration) captures the types of business in which a firm is engaged. See Form BD, Item 12; see also Form BR, Section 2 (Registration/Notice Filing/Type of Office/Activities), Item D.

Rule 3110 requires a member firm, regardless of size or type, to have a supervisory system for the activities of its associated persons that is reasonably designed to achieve compliance with applicable securities laws and regulations, and FINRA rules. The rule sets forth the minimum requirements of a member firm's supervisory system that includes registering a location as an OSJ or branch office that meets the definitions under Rule 3110(f) and inspecting all offices and locations in accordance with Rule 3110(c). The rule categorizes offices or locations as an OSJ or supervisory branch office, a non-supervisory branch office, or a non-branch location.<sup>35</sup> The requirements to register, inspect and have a principal on-site vary based on the categorization. Specifically, the rule requires the registration and designation as an OSJ or branch office of each location, including the main office, that meets their respective definition under paragraphs (f)(1) and (f)(2) of Rule 3110, as described in more detail below.<sup>36</sup>

OSJs are a subset of branch offices. Rule 3110(f)(2) defines a "branch office" as "any location where one or more associated persons of a member firm regularly conducts the business of effecting any transactions in, or inducing or attempting to induce the purchase or sale of, any security, or is held out as such[.]"<sup>37</sup> In addition, any location that is responsible for supervising the activities of persons associated with the member at one or more non-branch locations of the member is a branch office (i.e., a supervisory branch office).<sup>38</sup> A location registered as a branch office must have one or more appropriately registered representatives or principals in each office,

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<sup>35</sup> See FINRA Rule 3110(c).

<sup>36</sup> See FINRA Rules 3110(a)(3) and 3110.01. Currently, firms are required to register each branch office and indicate, among other things, whether it is an OSJ, by filing Form BR. See Section 2 of Form BR, requiring the applicant to indicate whether an office is a "FINRA OSJ" or "non-OSJ branch," <https://www.finra.org/sites/default/files/web-crd-form-br-filing.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> See FINRA Rule 3110(f)(2)(A).

<sup>38</sup> See FINRA Rule 3110(f)(2)(B).

and is subject to an inspection at least every three years, unless it is a supervisory branch office in which case it is subject to at least an annual inspection.<sup>39</sup>

Depending upon the functions occurring at a branch office, it may be further classified as an OSJ, which Rule 3110(f)(1) defines as a member's business location at which any one or more of the following functions take place: (1) order execution or market making; (2) structuring of public offerings or private placements; (3) maintaining custody of customers' funds or securities; (4) final acceptance (approval) of new accounts on behalf of the member; (5) review and endorsement of customer orders, pursuant to Rule 3110(b)(2);<sup>40</sup> (6) final approval of retail communications for use by persons associated with the member, pursuant to Rule 2210(b)(1), except for an office that solely conducts final approval of research reports;<sup>41</sup> or (7) responsibility for supervising the activities of persons associated with the member at one or more other branch offices of the member. An office designated as an OSJ must have an appropriately registered principal on-site at the location, and must be inspected at least annually.<sup>42</sup>

However, subject to specified conditions, an office or location may be deemed a "non-branch location," and excluded from registration as a branch office. Currently, Rule 3110(f)(2)(A) sets forth seven exclusions—often referred to as unregistered offices or non-branch locations—of which two pertain to residential locations.<sup>43</sup> One such exclusion appears

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<sup>39</sup> See FINRA Rule 3110(a)(4), and FINRA Rule 3110(c)(1)(A) and (B).

<sup>40</sup> FINRA Rule 3110(b)(2) pertains to the review of a member's investment banking and securities business and provides that "[t]he supervisory procedures required by [Rule 3110(b) (Written Procedures)] shall include procedures for the review by a registered principal, evidenced in writing, of all transactions relating to the investment banking or securities business of the member."

<sup>41</sup> In general, with some exceptions, paragraph (b)(1) of Rule 2210 (Communications with the Public) requires that an appropriately qualified registered principal approve each retail communication prior to use or filing with FINRA.

<sup>42</sup> See FINRA Rules 3110(a)(4) and 3110(c)(1)(A).

<sup>43</sup> See generally FINRA Rule 3110(f)(2)(A) which, in addition to the primary residence and the non-primary residence exclusions that are further described, excludes the following from the definition of "branch office": (1) any location that is established solely for

under Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii) and exempts from registration as a branch office an associated person's primary residence subject to the following express conditions: (1) only one associated person, or multiple associated persons who reside at that location and are members of the same immediate family, conduct business at the location; (2) the location is not held out to the public as an office and the associated person does not meet with customers at the location; (3) neither customer funds nor securities are handled at that location; (4) the associated person is assigned to a designated branch office, and such designated branch office is reflected on all business cards, stationery, retail communications and other communications to the public by such associated person; (5) the associated person's correspondence and communications with the public are subject to the firm's supervision in accordance with the Rule; (6) electronic communications (e.g., email) are made through the member's electronic system; (7) all orders are entered through the designated branch office or an electronic system established by the member that is reviewable at the branch office; (8) written supervisory procedures pertaining to supervision of sales activities conducted at the residence are maintained by the member; and (9) a list of the residence locations is maintained by the member ("primary residence exclusion").<sup>44</sup> The second exclusion that pertains to a residential location appears under Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(iii) and is any location, other than a primary residence, that is used for securities business for less than 30 business days in any one calendar year, provided that the member complies with the conditions

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customer service or back office type functions where no sales activities are conducted and that is not held out to the public as a branch office; (2) any office of convenience, where associated persons occasionally and exclusively by appointment meet with customers, which is not held out to the public as an office; (3) any location that is used primarily to engage in non-securities activities and from which the associated person(s) effects no more than 25 securities transactions in any one calendar year; provided that any retail communication identifying such location also sets forth the address and telephone number of the location from which the associated person(s) conducting business at the non-branch locations are directly supervised; (4) the Floor of a registered national securities exchange where a member conducts a direct access business with public customers; or (5) a temporary location established in response to the implementation of a business continuity plan.

<sup>44</sup> See FINRA Rule 3110(f)(2)(ii)a. through i.

described in (1) through (8) above (“non-primary residence exclusion”). In general, the non-primary residence exclusion typically refers to a vacation or second home.<sup>45</sup> A non-branch location must be inspected on a periodic schedule, presumed to be at least every three years.<sup>46</sup>

Notwithstanding either of these two residential exclusions or the other exclusions listed under Rule 3110(f)(2)(A),<sup>47</sup> a primary or non-primary residence location that is responsible for either the supervisory activities set forth in the OSJ definition or for supervising the activities of persons associated with the member at one or more non-branch locations of the member is considered an OSJ or (supervisory) branch office, respectively.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, such residential supervisory offices are subject to registration, an annual inspection and, in some cases, additional licensing requirements.<sup>49</sup>

As noted above, the branch office definition and its exclusions, including the conditions for the primary residence and non-primary residence exclusions, is a uniform definition FINRA developed in coordination with the NYSE and other self-regulatory organizations (“SROs”), and state securities regulators, and it has been in place since 2005 (collectively, the “uniform branch office definition”).<sup>50</sup> The codification of the seven exclusions from registration in the uniform branch office definition recognized both practical situations and advances in technology used to conduct and monitor business, the evolving nature of business models, and changing lifestyle and work practices while also preserving investor protection through specified safeguards and limitations such as those appearing in the primary residence exclusion.<sup>51</sup> In the approval order

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<sup>45</sup> See Notice to Members 06-12 (March 2006) (“Notice 06-12”).

<sup>46</sup> See note 3, supra.

<sup>47</sup> See note 43, supra.

<sup>48</sup> See FINRA Rule 3110(f)(1)(D) through (G) and FINRA Rule 3110(f)(2)(B).

<sup>49</sup> See note 42, supra.

<sup>50</sup> See note 31, supra.

<sup>51</sup> See generally Notice to Members 05-67 (October 2005).

for the uniform branch office definition, the Commission noted that the limitations for the primary residence exclusion “closely track the limitations on the use of a private residence in the Books and Records Rules.”<sup>52</sup> The Commission also stated that the seven exclusions “recognize current business, lifestyle, and surveillance practices and provide associated persons with additional flexibility. For instance, because associated persons may have to work from home due to illness, or to provide childcare or eldercare for certain family members, the Commission believes it is appropriate to except primary residences from the definition of branch office while providing certain safeguards and limitations to protect investors.”<sup>53</sup> Further, the Commission stated that “[g]iven the continued advances in technology used to conduct and monitor businesses and changes in the structure of broker-dealers and in the lifestyles and work habits of the workforce, the Commission believes it is reasonable and appropriate for [FINRA] to reexamine how it determines whether business locations need to be registered as branch offices of broker-dealer members.”<sup>54</sup> Finally, the Commission expressed the view that the uniform branch office definition “strikes the right balance between providing flexibility to broker-dealer firms to accommodate the needs of their associated persons, while at the same time setting forth parameters that should ensure that all locations, including home offices, are appropriately supervised.”<sup>55</sup> FINRA believes that the Commission’s statements about advances in technology

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<sup>52</sup> See 70 FR 54782, 54783 (citation omitted).

<sup>53</sup> See 70 FR 54782, 54787. See also Securities Exchange Act Release No. 52402 (September 9, 2005), 70 FR 54788, 54795 (September 16, 2005) (Order Approving File No. SR-NYSE-2002-34) (stating, “the Commission believes that the seven proposed exceptions to registering as a branch office constitute a reasonable approach to recognize current business, lifestyle, and surveillance practices and provide associated persons with flexibility with respect to where they perform their jobs. For instance, because associated persons may have to work from home due to illness, or to provide childcare or eldercare for certain family members, the Commission believes it is appropriate to except primary residences from the definition of branch office.”).

<sup>54</sup> See 70 FR 54782, 54787.

<sup>55</sup> See note 53, supra.

and evolving workplace conventions, and the safeguards and limitations of the primary residence exclusion are apt for this proposed rule change as well.

### Impact of New Workplace Models

As noted above, many employers closed their offices and moved to a broad remote work environment to contend with the public health crisis. In response, FINRA requested comment regarding pandemic-related issues and questions, including the comment process in connection with the temporary amendments to Rule 3110,<sup>56</sup> and discussions with FINRA’s advisory committees and other industry representatives. Firms responded that they relied extensively on technology to support their effective transition to the remote work environment and enhance the supervision of geographically dispersed associated persons, many of whom have been working from home since early 2020 and may continue to do so in some manner in the current environment.<sup>57</sup> These technological tools facilitating their supervisory practices include surveillance systems, electronic tracking programs or applications, and electronic communications, including video conferencing tools.<sup>58</sup> In addition, some firms have further

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<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Submitted Comments to Securities Exchange Act Release No. 94018 (January 20, 2022), 87 FR 4072 (January 26, 2022) (Notice of Filing and Immediate Effectiveness of File No. SR-FINRA-2022-001), <https://www.sec.gov/comments/sr-finra-2022-001/srfinra2022001.htm>; and Securities Exchange Act Release No. 89188 (June 30, 2020), 85 FR 40713 (July 7, 2020) (Notice of Filing and Immediate Effectiveness of File No. SR-FINRA-2020-019), <https://www.sec.gov/comments/sr-finra-2020-019/srfinra2020019.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> See generally Regulatory Notice 21-44 (December 2021).

<sup>58</sup> See generally Regulatory Notice 20-16 (May 2020); see also FINRA White Paper, Technology Based Innovations for Regulatory Compliance (“RegTech”) in the Securities Industry (September 2018) (reporting, among other things, that as financial services firms seek to keep pace with regulatory compliance requirements, they are turning to new and innovative regulatory tools to assist them in meeting their obligations in an effective and efficient manner), [https://www.finra.org/sites/default/files/2018\\_RegTech\\_Report.pdf](https://www.finra.org/sites/default/files/2018_RegTech_Report.pdf).

noted that the flexibility remote work offers has made a positive impact in attracting more diverse talent, and retaining existing talent.<sup>59</sup>

As pandemic-related restrictions are easing,<sup>60</sup> many member firms are moving towards a blended workforce model for their employees, consisting of working on-site in a conventional office setting and working remotely in an alternative location such as a private residence. Similar to the changed environment underlying the Commission's approval order of the uniform branch office definition that codified the existing seven exclusions, FINRA believes that the structural and lifestyle changes for member firms and their workforce catalyzed by the pandemic—along with advances in technology—merit reevaluation of some aspects of the branch office registration and inspection requirements. Specifically, FINRA believes the regulatory benefit of requiring firms to designate a private residence as an OSJ or branch office should now be reconsidered where the risk profile of these offices can be effectively controlled through practically based safeguards and limitations. FINRA is therefore proposing to adopt new Supplementary Material .19 under Rule 3110 to establish a Residential Supervisory Location as a non-branch location, subject to specified safeguards and limitations. This proposed new non-branch location would target the subset of residential locations that have many of the attributes contained in the primary residence exclusion, but must be registered as an OSJ or branch office because of the supervisory functions taking place there.

#### Proposed Residential Supervisory Location as a Non-Branch Location

The proposed definition of a Residential Supervisory Location would be based largely on several existing aspects of Rule 3110(f). In particular, FINRA is proposing to incorporate the existing supervisory functions appearing in the OSJ definition (Rule 3110(f)(1)) and branch office definition (Rule 3110(f)(2)(B)) with the existing residential exclusions set forth in the

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<sup>59</sup> See generally Submitted Comments to Regulatory Notice 20-42 (December 2020), <https://www.finra.org/rules-guidance/notices/20-42#comments>.

<sup>60</sup> See note 6, *supra*.

branch office definition to classify a Residential Supervisory Location as a non-branch location. Currently, a private residence at which these supervisory functions occur must be registered and designated as a branch office or OSJ under Rule 3110(a)(3), and inspected at least annually under Rule 3110(c)(1)(A). By treating such location as a non-branch location, the private residence would become subject to inspections on a regular periodic schedule under Rule 3110(c)(1)(C), presumed to be every three years.<sup>61</sup>

Proposed Rule 3110.19 would incorporate some existing safeguards and limitations firms must already satisfy to rely on the primary residence exclusion<sup>62</sup> as FINRA believes that several of these conditions are also appropriate for the proposed Residential Supervisory Location. FINRA intends for the terms underlying the proposed Residential Supervisory Location to be interpreted consistently with their meaning in Rule 3110(f) and existing related guidance.<sup>63</sup> In addition, FINRA is proposing to further augment the safeguards and limitations to describe the locations that would be ineligible to rely on proposed Rule 3110.19.

A. Safeguards and Conditions to Rely on the Residential Supervisory Location Exclusion (Proposed Rule 3110.19(a))

As described above, FINRA is proposing to adopt Rule 3110.19 to establish a Residential Supervisory Location as a new non-branch location, but subject to specified conditions, most of which are derived from those currently required for the primary residence and non-primary residence exclusions. FINRA is proposing to add one new condition to a Residential Supervisory Location: a restriction from maintaining original books and records at such location.

Under proposed Rule 3110.19(a), any such location would be considered a non-branch location (and thus excluded from branch office registration), provided that: (1) only one associated person, or multiple associated persons who reside at that location and are members of

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<sup>61</sup> See note 3, supra.

<sup>62</sup> See Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii)a., b., c., d., e., f, and i.

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., Notice 06-12.

the same immediate family, conduct business at the location (proposed Rule 3110.19(a)(1));<sup>64</sup> (2) the location is not held out to the public as an office (proposed Rule 3110.19(a)(2));<sup>65</sup> (3) the associated person does not meet with customers or prospective customers at the location (proposed Rule 3110.19(a)(3));<sup>66</sup> (4) no sales activity takes place at the location other than as permitted and subject to the conditions set forth under Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii) or (iii) (proposed Rule 3110.19(a)(4));<sup>67</sup> (5) neither customer funds nor securities are handled at that location (proposed Rule 3110.19(a)(5));<sup>68</sup> (6) the associated person is assigned to a designated branch office, and such designated branch office is reflected on all business cards, stationery, retail communications and other communications to the public by such associated person (proposed Rule 3110.19(a)(6));<sup>69</sup> (7) the associated person's correspondence and communications with the public are subject to the firm's supervision in accordance with Rule 3110 (proposed Rule 3110.19(a)(7));<sup>70</sup> (8) all electronic communications by the associated person at that location are

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<sup>64</sup> See Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii)a. ("Only one associated person, or multiple associated persons who reside at that location and are members of the same immediate family, conduct business at the location[.]").

<sup>65</sup> See Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii)b. ("The location is not held out to the public as an office and the associated persons does not meet with customers at the location[.]").

<sup>66</sup> See note 65, *supra*.

<sup>67</sup> An associated person's private residence, other than a primary residence, remains subject to the less than 30-business-day in any calendar year limitation on use for securities business.

<sup>68</sup> See Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii)c. ("Neither customer funds nor securities are handled at the location[.]").

<sup>69</sup> See Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii)d. ("The associated person is assigned to a designated branch office, and such designated branch office is reflected on all business cards, stationery, retail communications and other communications to the public by such associated person[.]").

<sup>70</sup> See Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii)e. ("The associated person's correspondence and communications with the public are subject to the firm's supervision in accordance with this Rule[.]").

made through the member's electronic system (proposed Rule 3110.19(a)(8));<sup>71</sup> (9) a list of the residence locations is maintained by the member (proposed Rule 3110.19(a)(9));<sup>72</sup> and (10) all books or records required to be made and preserved by the member under the federal securities laws or FINRA rules are maintained by the member other than at the location (proposed Rule 3110.19(a)(10)).

FINRA notes that the proposed conditions are substantially similar to those applied to the current primary and non-primary residence exclusions, and are supplemented by a proposed additional condition that would preclude a firm from maintaining any books or records required to be made and preserved by the member under the federal securities laws or FINRA rules at the Residential Supervisory Location. FINRA believes that this proposed new limitation would strengthen a firm's ability to monitor the supervisory activities occurring at a Residential Supervisory Location and act to lower the overall risks associated with such location because the books and records required to be made and preserved by the member under the federal securities laws or FINRA rules cannot be maintained on-site. Moreover, FINRA notes that sales activities would be permissible at a Residential Supervisory Location to the same extent sales activities are permitted currently under such exclusions. As previously noted, the conditions for the current primary and non-primary residence exclusions, which align with the SEC's Books and Records Rules, were developed in coordination with other SROs and state securities regulators and such exclusions have been in place since 2005.<sup>73</sup> As such, firms have developed experience with monitoring and supervising these conditions, and FINRA believes member firms will be able to rely on such experience to reasonably supervise similar conditions for proposed Residential

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<sup>71</sup> See Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii)f. ("Electronic communications (e.g., e-mail) are made through the member's electronic system[.]").

<sup>72</sup> See Rule 3110(f)(2)(A)(ii)i. ("A list of the residence locations is maintained by the member[.]").

<sup>73</sup> 17 CFR 240.17a-4(l); see also note 31, supra.

Supervisory Locations. As with any non-branch location, a Residential Supervisory Location would be subject to an inspection on a periodic schedule, presumed to be at least every three years.<sup>74</sup>

B. Ineligible Locations (Proposed Rule 3110.19(b))

FINRA is further proposing several location categories that are ineligible for designation as a Residential Supervisory Location. The nine proposed categories of ineligibility are events or activities of a member firm or its associated persons that FINRA believes are more likely to raise investor protection concerns based on FINRA rules, an associated person's level of supervisory experience with the member firm or qualifications, or an associated person's record of specified regulatory or disciplinary events.

1. Member Firm Ineligibility

Under proposed Rule 3110.19(b), a location would be ineligible for designation as a Residential Supervisory Location, non-branch location, in accordance with Rule 3110.19 if: (i) the member is designated as a "Restricted Firm" under Rule 4111 (Restricted Firm Obligations)<sup>75</sup> (proposed Rule 3110.19(b)(1)); (ii) the member is designated as a "Taping Firm" under Rule 3170 (Tape Recording of Registered Persons by Certain Firms)<sup>76</sup> (proposed Rule 3110.19(b)(2)); or (iii) the member is currently undergoing, or is required to undergo, a review

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<sup>74</sup> See note 3, *supra*.

<sup>75</sup> In general, Rule 4111 requires member firms that are identified as "Restricted Firms" to deposit cash or qualified securities in a segregated, restricted account; adhere to specified conditions or restrictions; or comply with a combination of such obligations. See generally *Regulatory Notice* 21-34 (September 2021) (announcing FINRA's adoption of rules to address firms with a significant history of misconduct).

<sup>76</sup> In general, Rule 3170 requires a member firm to establish, enforce and maintain special written procedures supervising the telemarketing activities of all of its registered persons, including the tape recording of conversations, if the firm has hired more than a specified percentage of registered persons from firms that meet FINRA Rule 3170's definition of "disciplined firm." See generally *Regulatory Notice* 14-10 (March 2014) (announcing FINRA's adoption of consolidated rules governing supervision).

under Rule 1017(a)(7) as a result of one or more associated persons at such location<sup>77</sup> (proposed Rule 3110.19(b)(3)). These rules expressly account for firms that pose higher risks, and for that reason, would be ineligible to rely on proposed Rule 3110.19(a).

## 2. Associated Person Ineligibility

In addition, under proposed Rule 3110.19(b), a location would be ineligible for designation as a Residential Supervisory Location, a non-branch location, in accordance with proposed Rule 3110.19 where: (i) one or more associated persons at such location is a designated supervisor who has less than one year of direct supervisory experience with the member (proposed Rule 3110.19(b)(4)); (ii) one or more associated persons at such location is functioning as a principal for a limited period in accordance with Rule 1210.04<sup>78</sup> (proposed Rule 3110.19(b)(5)); (iii) one or more associated persons at such location is subject to a mandatory heightened supervisory plan under the rules of the SEC, FINRA or state regulatory agency (proposed Rule 3110.19(b)(6)); (iv) one or more associated persons at such location is statutorily disqualified, unless such disqualified person has been approved (or is otherwise permitted pursuant to FINRA rules and the federal securities laws) to associate with a member and is not subject to a mandatory heightened supervisory plan under paragraph (b)(6) of this

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<sup>77</sup> Rule 1017(a)(7) requires a member firm to file an application for continuing membership when a natural person seeking to become an owner, control person, principal or registered person of the member firm has, in the prior five years, one or more defined “final criminal matters” or two or more “specified risk events” unless the member firm has submitted a written request to FINRA seeking a materiality consultation for the contemplated activity. Rule 1017(a)(7) applies whether the person is seeking to become an owner, control person, principal or registered person at the person’s current member firm or at a new member firm. See generally Regulatory Notice 21-09 (March 2021) (announcing FINRA’s adoption of rules to address brokers with a significant history of misconduct).

<sup>78</sup> In general, Rule 1210.04 (Requirements for Registered Persons Functioning as Principals for a Limited Period) imposes an experience requirement (18 months of experience within the preceding five-year period) on those registered representatives who are designated by their firms to function in a principal capacity for a fixed 120-day period before having passed an appropriate principal qualification examination. See generally Regulatory Notice 17-30 (October 2017) (announcing FINRA’s adoption of consolidated rules governing qualification and registration).

Supplementary Material or otherwise as a condition to approval or permission for such association (proposed Rule 3110.19(b)(7)); (v) one or more associated persons at such location has an event in the prior three years that required a “yes” response to any item in Questions 14A(1)(a) and 2(a), 14B(1)(a) and 2(a), 14C, 14D and 14E on Form U4<sup>79</sup> (proposed Rule 3110.19(b)(8)); or (vi) one or more associated persons at a location is currently subject to, or has been notified in writing that it will be subject to, any investigation, proceeding, complaint or other action by the member, the SEC, an SRO, including FINRA, or state securities commission (or agency or office performing like functions) alleging they have failed reasonably to supervise another person subject to their supervision, with a view to preventing the violation of any provision of the Securities Act, the Exchange Act, the Investment Advisers Act, the Investment Company Act, the Commodity Exchange Act, or any rule or regulation under any of such Acts, or any of the rules of the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board (proposed Rule 3110.19(b)(9)).

FINRA believes that an associated person designated at such location should have more than one year of supervisory experience with the member and have passed the appropriate principal level qualification examination before the associated person’s private residence can be treated as a non-branch location under proposed Rule 3110.19(a). In addition, FINRA believes that the imposition of a mandatory heightened supervisory plan and the specified disclosures on Form U4 pertaining to criminal convictions and final regulatory action are indicia of increased risk to investors at some firms and locations such that they should not be treated as a non-branch location under the proposed supplementary material.

A private residence meeting the description of any one of the categories in proposed Rule 3110.19(b) would be ineligible for designation as a Residential Supervisory Location, even with the safeguards and limitations listed in proposed Rule 3110.19(a). A member firm would be

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<sup>79</sup> Form U4’s Questions 14A(1)(a) and 2(a), 14B(1)(a) and 2(a) elicit reporting of criminal convictions, and Questions 14C, 14D, and 14E pertain to regulatory action disclosures.

required to designate such private residence as an OSJ or branch office, as applicable, unless the location meets a branch office exclusion under Rule 3110(f)(2). FINRA believes the proposed list of ineligibility categories is appropriately derived from existing rule-based criteria that already have a process to identify firms that may pose greater concern (e.g., Rules 4111 and 3170) or to identify associated persons that may pose greater concerns as supervisors due to the nature of disclosures of regulatory or disciplinary events on the uniform registration forms or where the firm has not yet had the opportunity to gauge such person's effectiveness as a supervisor due to their limited supervisory experience with the member firm. FINRA believes that these objective categorical restrictions strike the correct balance and are sensible and consistent with a reasonably designed supervisory system while still promoting investor protections.

FINRA acknowledges the shift towards a permanent blended or hybrid workforce model and therefore believes under the current environment, private residences responsible for the supervisory activities and subject to the conditions described above should not require registration as branch offices. The proposed Residential Supervisory Location is intended to reflect a pragmatic balance between the hybrid workforce model and the parameters that should ensure that all locations, including residential locations, are appropriately supervised. Separate and apart from the classification of the office or location and the attendant inspection obligations, firms will continue to have an ongoing obligation to supervise the activities of each associated person in a manner reasonably designed to achieve compliance with applicable securities laws and regulations, and with applicable FINRA rules. FINRA emphasizes that member firms have a statutory duty to supervise their associated persons, regardless of their location, compensation or employment arrangement, or registration status, in accordance with the FINRA By-Laws and rules.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See Exchange Act Section 15(b)(4)(E), 15 U.S.C. 78o(b)(4)(E), and Exchange Act Section 15(b)(6)(A), 15 U.S.C. 78o(b)(6)(A).

If the Commission approves the proposed rule change, FINRA will announce the effective date of the proposed rule change in a Regulatory Notice. The effective date will be no later than 90 days following the publication of the Regulatory Notice announcing Commission approval.

## 2. Statutory Basis

FINRA believes that the proposed rule change is consistent with the provisions of Section 15A(b)(6) of the Act,<sup>81</sup> which requires, among other things, that FINRA rules must be designed to prevent fraudulent and manipulative acts and practices, to promote just and equitable principles of trade, and, in general, to protect investors and the public interest. In recognition of the ongoing advances in compliance technology and evolving lifestyle and work practices, FINRA believes that the proposed rule change will reasonably account for evolving work models by excluding from branch office registration a Residential Supervisory Location at which lower risk activities occur, while retaining important investor protections with a set of safeguards and limitations derived largely from the primary residence exclusion. The proposed new non-branch location is intended to provide a practical and balanced way for firms to continue to effectively meet the core regulatory obligation to establish and maintain a system to supervise the activities of each associated person that is reasonably designed to achieve compliance with applicable securities laws and regulations, and with applicable FINRA rules that directly serve investor protection.

### B. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement on Burden on Competition

FINRA does not believe that the proposed rule change will result in any burden on competition that is not necessary or appropriate in furtherance of the purposes of the Act.

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<sup>81</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78o-3(b)(6).

## Economic Impact Assessment

FINRA has undertaken an economic impact assessment, as set forth below, to analyze the regulatory need for the proposed rule change, its potential economic impacts, including anticipated costs, benefits, and distributional and competitive effects, relative to the current baseline, and the alternatives FINRA considered in assessing how best to meet FINRA's regulatory objectives.

### 1. Regulatory Need

As discussed above, in the wake of the pandemic, many member firms are developing hybrid workforce models for their employees. In these new ways of working, some employees may work permanently in an alternative location such as a private residence, other employees may spend some time in alternative locations and some time on-site in a conventional office setting, and some may work on-site full time.<sup>82</sup> Absent the proposed rule change, when the temporary relief from the requirement to submit branch office applications on Form BR for new office locations ends, many member firms would need to either curtail activities at residential locations or register large numbers of residential locations as OSJs or supervisory branch offices. Either type of adjustment would create potentially significant costs. The proposed rule change would reduce, but not eliminate, the need for such adjustments since the activities conducted at some new residential locations would likely not meet the requirements of the proposed rule change.

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<sup>82</sup> According to the Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes (SWAA), post-COVID, many employers are planning to allow employees to work from home between two and three days per week. See Jose Maria Barrero, Nicholas Bloom & Steven J. Davis, SWAA April 2022 Updates (April 11, 2022), [https://wfhresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WFHResearch\\_updates-April-2022.pdf](https://wfhresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WFHResearch_updates-April-2022.pdf). The number of expected work-from-home days post-pandemic has been increasing steadily since the January 2021 survey. The SWAA is monthly survey with respondents that are working-age persons in the United States that had earnings of at least \$20,000 in 2019. Further details about this survey can be found at <https://wfhresearch.com>.

## 2. Economic Baseline

The economic baseline includes both current and foreseeable workforce arrangements and business practices, including those that were first developed during the pandemic and have been modified since in light of reduced health and safety concerns. In particular, the economic baseline includes the innovations, and investments in communication and surveillance technology, that have supported and continue to support supervision in the remote work environment.<sup>83</sup> These innovations and investments have depended in part on the temporary suspension of the requirement to submit branch office applications on Form BR for new office locations, provided in Notice 20-08. However, in order to provide a full accounting of the likely effects of the proposed rule change, the analysis considers the impact of the proposed rule change under the assumption that, going forward, the temporary suspension of the above requirement is no longer in effect. The current supervisory requirements of Rule 3110 will then apply, including the provisions of Rule 3110 that categorize an OSJ, branch office and non-branch location and that establish the supervisory and registration requirements of each office or location. As discussed above, a location registered as a branch office must have one or more appropriately registered representatives or principals in each office, and is subject to an inspection at least every three years, unless it is a supervisory branch office in which case it is subject to at least an annual inspection.

As of April 30, 2022, FINRA's membership included 3,365 firms<sup>84</sup> with 151,463 registered branch offices. Of these branch offices, 18,290 (12%) are OSJs, with 1,910 of them

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<sup>83</sup> The pandemic propelled increased reliance on technology solutions in the remote work environment. A McKinsey survey in late 2020 found that, overall, firms had accelerated their adoption of technology, with large accelerations in the implementation of changes to increase remote working and collaboration, as well the use of advanced technologies in operations. See McKinsey & Company, How COVID-19 has pushed companies over the technology tipping point—and transformed business forever, October 5, 2020, <https://mck.co/3nlK8b2>.

<sup>84</sup> This count excludes firms with membership pending approval, and withdrawn or terminated from membership.

identified as private residences.<sup>85</sup> There are 21,647 principal level registered persons serving as OSJ supervisors, with 1,775 (8%) working at OSJs identified as private residences.<sup>86</sup> Data on the number of residential locations at which supervisors are currently working full or part time may be incomplete, due to the temporary suspension of the Form BR requirement for new offices included in Notice 20-08. However, large member firms (500 or more registered persons) account for about 69% of OSJs. By type of business, diversified and retail firms account for 81% of OSJs. To the extent that these member firms account for most supervisory staff, they are potentially currently making broad use of hybrid workforce arrangements involving residential locations.

### 3. Economic Impacts

Absent the proposed rule change, if the temporary relief on registering new branches with Form BR, provided during the pandemic, ends, many member firms would likely need to either curtail activities at residential locations or register large numbers of residential locations as OSJs or supervisory branch offices. This potential increase in office count would impact inspection obligations and in some cases, licensing requirements associated with individual locations. These additional requirements would hold even for office locations that bear lower risk

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<sup>85</sup> The number of branch offices and OSJs is derived from Form BR, a uniform form that a member firm uses to register with FINRA and as required by the relevant state jurisdictions or other SROs, the firm's location as a branch office. Form BR's Section 1 (General Information) provides a place for a firm to indicate whether the branch office is a private residence by checking a "Private Residence Checkbox." The number of OSJs is derived from Form BR's Section 2 (Registration/Notice Filing/Type of Office/Activities), which requires a firm to indicate whether the branch office is an OSJ. Some OSJs have more than one supervisor, and some principals serve as supervisors for more than one OSJ. FINRA's records from Form U4 show that, altogether, there are about 138,035 registered persons with principal registration categories (including those in OSJ supervisory roles).

<sup>86</sup> In addition, FINRA member firms with a single branch account for 1,744 of these OSJs and 1,967 of the supervisors. Forty-three FINRA member firms do not have any branches registered; these firms are all small member firms and not counted among the 3,365 firms.

characteristics and from which lower risk supervisory functions are conducted. The economic impacts of these changes would be mitigated by the proposed rule change.

Changes in the number of different types of offices and locations since the start of the pandemic, along with current data, can provide a rough indication of the potential impact of the proposed rule change on firms. As Table 1 below shows, the number of offices and locations has fallen except for non-branch locations. Residential non-branch locations have increased by 12,921 (53%). Some of these new residential non-branch locations would have needed to register as OSJs if not for the temporary suspension of the Form BR requirement and will need to register as OSJs unless the proposed rule change is adopted. Further, some of the 1,910 private residences that are currently registered as OSJs, described above, might be able to become Residential Supervisory Locations if the proposed rule change is adopted. The numbers suggest that the number of offices and locations that may benefit from the proposed rule change is in the thousands. While Form U4 and Form BR can be used to count numbers of work locations and identify high-level activities at registered branch offices, the number of residential locations that would meet the conditions of proposed Rule 3110.19(a) alone would depend on specific information about the activities at residential locations that these forms do not provide.<sup>87</sup>

Table 1 Numbers of Offices and Locations, Pre-Pandemic and Current

	December 31, 2019	April 30, 2022
Registered branch locations	152,682	151,463
OSJs	19,123	18,290
Non-OSJs	134,559	133,173
Non-branch locations	56,317	66,054
Residential non-branch locations	24,369	37,290

#### Anticipated Benefits

<sup>87</sup> Non-branch locations do not have to be registered with FINRA. The estimates for non-branch locations are obtained by reviewing Form U4. There may be some double counting of non-branch locations if members record the address differently on more than one Form U4 (e.g., use “St.” on one and “Street” on another).

The proposed rule change would allow some of the work arrangements adopted during the pandemic to continue with only small additional compliance costs. Specifically, as long as the location is a private residence and is not otherwise ineligible under the rule, associated persons could continue to conduct work that meets the requirements of the proposed rule change. Not all new residential locations would qualify as Residential Supervisory Locations, so some would need to register as some type of branch location—and face higher compliance costs—or otherwise meet a branch office exclusion under Rule 3110(f)(2) or stop operating as a work location.

The proposed rule change, also creates an opportunity for continued innovation in workforce arrangements. The proposed rule change may lead to centralizing tasks in specific OSJs and restructuring of job functions to enable the use of a Residential Supervisory Location on a full or part time basis, and possibly an increase in the number of supervisors. Some current OSJs might qualify as Residential Supervisory Locations with no further adjustments, allowing members to reduce expenses on compliance. Firms would make use of these opportunities if they are beneficial to their operations, and not otherwise.

The proposed rule change would also support the competitiveness of the broker-dealer industry for educated individuals who seek professional positions.<sup>88</sup> The expectation of workplace flexibility and remote work by such individuals may lead them away from the broker-dealer industry if other segments of financial services or professional occupations offer more flexible workforce arrangements.

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<sup>88</sup> See note 82, *supra*. See also Jose Maria Barrero, Nicholas Bloom & Steven J. Davis, *Why Working from Home Will Stick* (NBER Working Paper 28731, April 2021), <https://wfhresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/w28731-3-May-2021.pdf>, who point to a lasting effect of the pandemic on work arrangements, in particular for those with higher education and earnings; and Alexander Bick, Adam Blandin & Karel Mertens, *Work from Home Before and After the COVID-19 Outbreak*, (Working Paper, February 2022), [https://karelmertenscom.files.wordpress.com/2022/02/wfh\\_feb17\\_2022\\_paper.pdf](https://karelmertenscom.files.wordpress.com/2022/02/wfh_feb17_2022_paper.pdf) who find consistent results, with a higher adoption rate of work from home jobs in Finance and Insurance, relative to other industries, reflected in Figure 10.

As noted above, the pandemic caused firms throughout the financial services sector to accelerate the adoption of technological solutions.<sup>89</sup> Technology has been used not only to make remote work possible but also to conduct a range of compliance and regulatory risk management activities. By facilitating hybrid work arrangements, the proposed rule change would support continued adoption and innovation in technological solutions and reductions in the cost of these solutions.

Finally, the proposed rule change would relieve member firms from paying FINRA branch office registration fees for locations that would be branch offices under the baseline but qualify as Residential Supervisory Locations. Member firms may also find that some existing branch locations become unnecessary given the proposed rule change and could reduce expenses attendant to those locations, including such fees. However, member firms would still need to pay branch office registration fees generally for new residential locations that meet the definition of a “branch office,” and are not covered by the proposed Residential Supervisory Location designation or do not meet a branch office exclusion under Rule 3110(f)(2).

#### Anticipated Costs

The proposed rule change provides firms with a new designation for work locations without removing any designations that are available under the baseline. Firms will therefore use the new Residential Supervisory Location designation only if doing so is beneficial to their operations relative to using one of the existing designations. The cost of complying with the requirements of the new designation for work locations is obviously a factor in this decision. Firms may incur a number of new one-time costs, such as adjusting staffing and activities at existing locations, to initially meet the requirements of proposed Rule 3110.19. Firms may also need to develop new written supervisory procedures and new trainings for staff at Residential Supervisory Locations, and deploy these trainings, so staff are aware of the compliance

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<sup>89</sup> See note 83, supra.

requirements. Firms may incur new ongoing costs to monitor for compliance and for adjusting staffing and designations if a Residential Supervisory Location becomes ineligible for this designation because an associated person incurs events or actions described in proposed Rule 3110.19(b).

Classifying residential locations that would otherwise need to register as OSJs or branch offices as Residential Supervisory Locations will remove certain compliance requirements. Depending on the type of branch, the reduction in compliance requirements may include no longer having to have one or more appropriately registered representatives or principals in each office or to conduct inspections annually or every three years. These reductions in compliance requirements may create risks to member firms and investors.

To mitigate these risks, the proposal excludes locations on the basis of inexperience or prior harmful conduct by individuals working at those locations, and limits the activities that can be performed at those locations. The designation of certain locations as ineligible provides minimum standards for staff that are eligible to work in such locations. FINRA expects that most firms would go beyond these minimum standards in selecting staff who would perform supervisory and other sensitive work at Residential Supervisory Locations, and in monitoring their conduct.

#### 4. Alternatives Considered

FINRA is proposing to provide certain regulatory accommodations for the innovations in business organization and operations that occurred during the pandemic by modeling the Residential Supervisory Locations after the existing primary residence and non-primary residence exclusions, which have been in effect since 2005. FINRA considered adopting a proposed rule with just those exclusions and without the designation of certain locations as ineligible. More locations would qualify as Residential Supervisory Locations without the additional requirements. FINRA expects, however, that the proposed rule change provides a

better balance of the potential benefits and the risks that could impose costs on members and investors.

C. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement on Comments on the Proposed Rule Change Received from Members, Participants, or Others

Written comments were neither solicited nor received.

III. Date of Effectiveness of the Proposed Rule Change and Timing for Commission Action

Within 45 days of the date of publication of this notice in the Federal Register or within such longer period (i) as the Commission may designate up to 90 days of such date if it finds such longer period to be appropriate and publishes its reasons for so finding or (ii) as to which the self-regulatory organization consents, the Commission will:

- (A) by order approve or disapprove such proposed rule change, or
- (B) institute proceedings to determine whether the proposed rule change should be disapproved.

IV. Solicitation of Comments

Interested persons are invited to submit written data, views and arguments concerning the foregoing, including whether the proposed rule change is consistent with the Act. Comments may be submitted by any of the following methods:

Electronic Comments:

- Use the Commission's Internet comment form (<http://www.sec.gov/rules/sro.shtml>); or
- Send an e-mail to [rule-comments@sec.gov](mailto:rule-comments@sec.gov). Please include File Number SR-FINRA-2022-019 on the subject line.

Paper Comments:

- Send paper comments in triplicate to Secretary, Securities and Exchange Commission, 100 F Street, NE, Washington, DC 20549-1090.

All submissions should refer to File Number SR-FINRA-2022-019. This file number should be included on the subject line if e-mail is used. To help the Commission process and review your comments more efficiently, please use only one method. The Commission will post all comments on the Commission's Internet website (<http://www.sec.gov/rules/sro.shtml>). Copies of the submission, all subsequent amendments, all written statements with respect to the proposed rule change that are filed with the Commission, and all written communications relating to the proposed rule change between the Commission and any person, other than those that may be withheld from the public in accordance with the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 552, will be available for website viewing and printing in the Commission's Public Reference Room, 100 F Street, NE, Washington, DC 20549, on official business days between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Copies of such filing also will be available for inspection and copying at the principal office of FINRA. All comments received will be posted without change. Persons submitting comments are cautioned that we do not redact or edit personal identifying information from comment submissions. You should submit only information that you wish to make available publicly.

All submissions should refer to File Number SR-FINRA-2022-019 and should be submitted on or before **[INSERT DATE 21 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]**.

For the Commission, by the Division of Trading and Markets, pursuant to delegated authority.<sup>90</sup>

**J. Matthew DeLesDernier,**  
*Deputy Secretary.*

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<sup>90</sup> 17 CFR 200.30-3(a)(12).